Session 3

The Participation Forum

April 21, 1994

*Topic: Participation in Policy Reform**

Policy reform is an area of USAID work that used to be viewed as beyond the reach of participation. Speakers at the third session of the Participation Forum made a strong case that participation can and should be brought into the policy design and implementation process, even in undemocratic settings. Carol Peasley, Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Bureau for Africa, described and reflected upon the agricultural sector reform process in Malawi where she was, until recently, Mission Director. Roberta Mahoney, who served in Malawi as Program Officer and is now Senior Agricultural Policy Advisor in PPC, drew additional lessons from the Malawi case. Larry Cooley, President of Management Systems International and Director of the Implementing Policy Change project, set the Malawi experience in a broader framework. The session was introduced by USAID Administrator J. Brian Atwood, and I moderated the discussion. This session generated a large volume of e-mail, a sampling of which is included at the end of this summary--Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participation

Participation: An Iterative Process — *Brian Atwood*

The topic of policy reform is not new to USAID. Agency staff are constantly engaged in diplomatic discussions with representatives of other governments. Those discussions are at least as delicate, if not more so, than the discussions of our State Department colleagues on matters of national interest, because we are trying to encourage a government to take steps to improve itself or to develop its own economy or political system. This is indeed delicate. When outsiders, even outsiders with money to offer, get into policy discussions, they are often viewed with skepticism as claiming to know better than the people of the country.

In fact, it is impossible to be absolutely certain of the right course even in our own country. The United States is in the midst of a tremendous debate over health care, and many

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The Participation Forum is a series of monthly noontime meetings for USAID personnel to explore how to put into practice the Administrator's mandate to "build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved" ("Statement of Principles on Participatory Development," November 16, 1993). Guest speakers from in and outside of USAID describe their experiences and enter into a general discussion of the theme of the session. A summary of the meeting is disseminated within USAID by E-mail, and readers are encouraged to engage in an E-mail dialogue. Those within USAID should direct their E-mail to Diane La Voy; those outside can send their remarks via INTERNET, EHP@ACCESS.DIGEX.COM. Printed copies of the Forum summaries will be distributed to participants and attendees from outside of USAID and others interested in participatory development.

political leaders think they have all the right answers. But as the debate evolves, their views change as they hear from the people. In the same manner, we here at USAID may have some ideas with respect to policy reform, but we have to make sure that we help a government to communicate with and listen to its own people in the policy-making process.

USAID's work in policy reform should be an iterative process with the country concerned. After initial discussions with host country officials and political leaders, we ought to go back to the drawing board and see what impact those discussions have on our thinking. Then we should encourage officials and political leaders to talk to the people who will be affected by the particular policy reform. These talks will reveal whether or not the policy proposal needs to be revised. Indigenous NGOs should be engaged in these talks as well.

Last fall, I put out a statement of principles on participation. It is obviously easier to put out a statement of principles than it is to make these principles work. We think we should practice what we preach in terms of participation, and as we proceed here at USAID in our own iterative process of developing ideas about how to make participation work, let me say that I really think this is the right approach. We're getting there; I'm confident that it can be done.

Participation in Malawi's Ag Policy Program *Carol Peasley*

Policy reform is a process that includes analysis, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and redesign. It is not simply the preparation of USAID documents. Nor is implementation of policy reform limited to the period after the obligation of funds. Implementation begins during the design and negotiation of the program.

How the Policy Agenda Was Originally Defined. Malawi was known through most of the 1980s as a good economic performer. The World Bank referred to it as a "star performer," as President Dr. Hastings Kumuzu Banda frequently reminded listeners. President Banda traveled throughout the country telling his people that he and his government had brought them three necessities: food, clothing, and roofs that didn't leak. He also created a relatively repressive regime.

Perceptions of Malawi as a star performer slowly began to change in the mid-1980s, in part because of donor-funded research and analyses, some of which was done by Malawians. By late 1988, the country's poverty was beginning to be discussed more openly by donors and Malawian technocrats. Nonetheless, the president and the political establishment still crisscrossed the country talking about Malawi as a star performer. There was no consensus within the country on either development problems or strategies. And given the high degree of political repression, dialogue was seldom free and open, and opposing views were not tolerated. Few mechanisms existed for consensus building.

USAID Malawi presented its new five-year country program strategy to Washington in December of 1989. This included strategic objectives on agricultural productivity and off-farm employment. The strategy focused on Malawi's serious land constraint and proposed new programs to increase smallholder access to land and to improve the use of estate land to generate incomes and jobs. These preliminary program ideas followed closely on reform efforts initiated by the World Bank in 1989 under its Agriculture Sector Adjustment Credit (ASAC).

The initial agenda for USAID's agricultural sector reform program was defined through sector analyses and discussions with other donors and Malawian technocrats. As presented in our country strategy paper, the agenda was based heavily on the ASAC, which included several highly controversial reforms, for example, to restrict the conversion of customary (smallholder) land to the estate sector; to increase taxes on estate land; and to permit smallholders to produce burley tobacco, Malawi's highest value cash crop, by issuing production quotas to them. These

Bank reforms were controversial, and there was a feeling that they had been imposed as "conditions." The Bank program was not owned by the Malawians. Because some of USAID's strategy was based on the ASAC, which had not been a participatory process, and because of our own limited dialogue with Malawians, on a participation scale of one to ten, we probably would have earned about a two at this point.

How the Program Evolved As a Result of Participation. In early 1990, USAID/Malawi began to define the technical analyses that would be needed to support the program. We received substantial early support from REDSO Nairobi, particularly from social scientist Pat Fleuret. Pat, along with his REDSO and mission colleagues, traveled widely in the country to consult with smallholder farmers. They found a large number of illegal burley tobacco growers in the smallholder sector and thus met firsthand the growing grassroots demand for this new income-earning opportunity. Smallholders wanted access to burley production quotas; they did not want the estate sector to retain its monopoly.

Realizing that no one in USAID, the government, or other donor organizations understood the estate or leasehold sector (even though the World Bank's ag sector program included some very fundamental reforms of that sector), we sponsored a detailed survey of the estate sector, to be carried out by the University of Malawi's Bunda College of Agriculture, with support from the Institute of Development Anthropology in New York. All USAID staff working on design of the program went out with the survey teams at various times to interview farmers.

The results of the survey, which became available in September 1990, began to redefine how people viewed Malawi's ag sector. We were startled to find that the huge increase in estate land registration was in fact an increase in very small "estates." They were not large commercial estate enterprises, but graduated smallholders seeking access to burley tobacco quotas and land tenure security. The dualistic agricultural sector was obviously in the process of breaking down.

Donors, technocrats, and Malawian academicians clamored for copies of the report. Recognizing the strong interest, USAID urged the Ministry of Agriculture to host a number of meetings and debriefings by the researchers. These provoked some first-time dialogue on key ag policy issues.

The survey and consultation caused us to shift our basic policy agenda towards production and marketing reforms. These changes were reflected in the initial design document submitted to Washington in January of 1991. Again on a scale of one to ten, I would give us a four on participation in preparing this document. The Africa Bureau approved the document but urged us to look at smallholder choice in production and marketing as key elements of sectoral reform and to define with the Malawians a long-term vision for the ag sector.

By spring and summer of 1991, we had begun a series of new studies, many of them at the farm level, as well as political risk analysis. We also brought in a British consultant who had grown up in Malawi, worked in the tobacco industry, and knew just about everyone. He traveled throughout the country talking with smallholders and the largest estate owners and managers. During his first visit working on the program design and subsequent visits during program implementation, he helped us better understand the sector, and served as a bridge between the development types and industry, farmers, and government.

Opening Up the Dialogue. Throughout this period, implementation of the Bank's ASAC program became more contentious. Opposing groups began to approach the USAID mission directly, asking us to explain the newly initiated pilot smallholder burley program agreed to by the government under the Bank program. Recognizing that we should not be an intermediary, the mission tried to open up the dialogue. We encouraged the various parties to

debate issues in the same room at the same time. Debriefings on the design studies and analyses created excellent opportunities for such dialogue. For the first time, representatives from government ministries, the tobacco trade association, individual estates, and donors met together and discussed issues. This group ultimately became the project implementation committee.

This type of participation, including mission staff field trips in which farmers clearly articulated their desires, continued to influence the design. By the time we went into the final negotiations with the government, our vision was a simple one--choice: that smallholders could grow any crop they wanted, buy inputs from whomever they wanted, and sell their output to whomever they wanted.

Our efforts to broaden dialogue had a major impact on the content of the program, but we were still concerned that the Malawians did not really have the capacity to develop a consensus on their own ag policy agenda. This caused three further changes in the program design. First, we added a component to develop an agricultural policy research center at Bunda College, a center which could do research, sponsor open debate on the issues, and play a lead role in defining Malawi's agricultural policies. Second, we shortened the program from the original five years to three years, as we thought there was enough consensus on the initial reforms that it could become more of a Malawian, as opposed to a donor-imposed, program. Third, we added a studies component, primarily through Bunda College, to allow the Malawians to take the lead in defining the policy agenda for phase two of the program.

By the time we got to the final design stage, we had reached up to five or six on the participation scale. We had made significant changes in the content and phasing of the program to expand Malawian ownership.

Negotiating a Shared Vision. Formal negotiations took place during July-August 1991. The normal pattern in Malawi was to negotiate with the Ministry of Finance alone. Given the controversy about the Bank's project, we decided it was important to have as many actors as possible in the room at the same time for the negotiations. We therefore suggested that the government negotiating team be composed of the Secretary of the Treasury, the Principal Secretary of Agriculture, and the Principal Secretary of the Department of Economic Planning and Development, as well as their staffs.

I would like to add, because it is probably fairly unique, that on USAID's side it was an all-female negotiating team. We initiated the negotiations by seeking a consensus on a long-term vision for the ag sector, a vision of choice and freedom as a key to poverty alleviation. We tried to develop that consensus first rather than going immediately to the conditionality package, which is what the Malawi government initially wanted to discuss. More generally, we tried to avoid use of the term "conditionality" and to focus on the steps needed to achieve the shared vision.

Participation During Early Implementation. We tried to do a number of things to increase participation.

- Mission staff took lots of field trips to talk to the farmers about their problems and successes. (This facilitated our dialogue with government on issues and enabled us to give them positive feedback.)

- The mission supported a number of surveys to assess the impact of the program, some done by our Malawian staff, some done by Bunda College. (These surveys expanded contact with potential beneficiaries.)

- A number of consultants who had been involved with the program from the outset continued to foster participation. (The British consultant I mentioned earlier was particularly effective as an intermediary and consensus-builder between different interest groups.)

- The Ministry of Agriculture was heavily involved with monitoring and evaluation, especially at the regional level where some of the Ministry's strongest supporters for the program were. (This enhanced their commitment and stature and strengthened government of Malawi ownership.)

- The studies component of the program was implemented by the Malawians, not USAID staff. This included writing the scopes of work for those studies. (The Malawians said, "No donor has ever asked us to do a scope of work. You guys have always done them for us." It took a little extra time, but helped to build Malawian ownership.)

- During the mid-term evaluation in February of 1993, as political change was underway in Malawi, the evaluation team met with representatives from one of the major opposition parties, many of whom were burley estate owners. The idea was to explore their views on the smallholder burley program and to educate them on its poverty-alleviation potential.

Participation and Political Change. Malawi began to liberalize politically in late 1992. Today the country is dramatically different from what it was in the late 1980s, when a few brave technocrats were willing to look critically at the failures of the country's development policies. USAID's Agriculture Sector Assistance Program was designed and early implementation took place in that difficult closed political environment. Participation was consequently less than ideal. Nonetheless, it was not impossible. Even in unreceptive environments, USAID can expand participation and host-country ownership through such steps as surveys and studies, selection of consultants who can serve as bridges to the various interest groups, the phasing of programs to maximize ownership (even if it means shortening programs to cover only those areas for which there's real agreement), incorporating studies and capacity-building during the initial phases of a program, taking advantage of studies and surveys to create fora that bring multiple interest groups together, and making field trips, listening, and being willing to change.

Participation can become much more comprehensive and effective as the political situation matures. USAID Malawi is currently doing some exciting things in designing phase two of the ag sector program. We may have achieved a six on the participation scale in 1991-1992. Because of its extraordinary efforts to increase participation, USAID Malawi will have a far more effective phase two of its ag sector program.

Improving Our Vision Through Participation *Roberta Mahoney*

Malawi's policy reform appeared very simple. What could be more simple? Let farmers grow what they want, how they want, sell it wherever they want--pretty straightforward. Our initial focus on burley tobacco was even more simple and more direct: let them grow burley, let them grow it how they want, let them sell it where they want. In retrospect, it appears to have been a sort of stroke-of-the-pen reform, one that did not seem to require participation. But what appears simple in retrospect can be difficult to see at the outset.

I would like to comment very briefly on five lessons that I learned in reflecting back on my experience in Malawi.

The first lesson is that participation is important at the outset so that the problem can be adequately defined. In Malawi, participation brought all actors into defining the problem and suggesting a remedy.

The second is that participation continues to be important as a program moves along the design-to-implementation continuum. In our case, participation kept us on track and prevented us from getting sidetracked with empty rule changes.

The third is that there are no real secrets to participation, just a whole lot of work. The techniques of participation can be learned. It is important to keep focused on thinking through what is best and what needs to be done, not on what is easiest. For example, we did not use Malawian academics in the first of our studies because they were cheaper or closer. We used them because they knew more about local conditions and issues and because they could speak the local languages. We supplemented their skills as necessary. Contracting with a U.S. consulting firm would have been easier, but the Malawian study team we used did a better job.

The fourth lesson concerns what about the Malawi experience in policy reform is important to its replicability in other places. It is the unflinching commitment to people and to participation that we who were involved in the design felt and that was expressed at all levels. The first level of that commitment was expressed by the U.S. Congress, USAID, and the Bureau for Africa, through the definition, articulation, and enactment of the Development Fund for Africa legislation. We were committed to participation, and our mission director gave that commitment life. Participation requires time, money, people to do the job, and an abiding respect for our host country colleagues. The mission director has to send the signals that these activities are valued and that those involved in the design have the resources necessary to do the job. The director may also have to keep USAID Washington at arm's length, while the mission is trying to get the job done.

Finally, participation facilitates the ability to measure and to report on results. In our case, the more we talked to people, the more we were able to express our objectives and to measure progress in terms of real impact on real people. In our first year, incomes among small, rural producers increased by over $4 million. By the end of the second year, more than 20,000 farm families, over 100,000 people, who were affected by the program saw their cash incomes increase dramatically, up some six- or sevenfold, from admittedly very low levels. We know that smallholders earned more money, and we know that they spent it on school fees, on fertilizer, on seeds, on bicycles, and on food because we spoke to them and they told us.

The future looks even brighter. Each year, the number of people participating in the program has at least doubled. Momentum for the program and for agricultural and political reforms in general is increasing. Soon, all one million farm families will be able to grow what they want, how they want, and sell it as they see fit. Participation has been critical in helping us to realize this dream.

Lessons Learned from the IPC Project *Larry Cooley*

Introducing participatory approaches to policy selection and implementation needs to be seen in the context of a broader set of governance issues. If a donor is engaged in facilitating a process in which people are coming together and speaking out actively, the government will begin to receive demands from those sources. Thus, participation offers a chance to reinforce positive changes in the way decisions are made and to increase the role of various populations in decision-making.

Real commitment to participatory approaches has fundamental implications not only for what is done but how it is done. As development assistance people, we should be guided by the Hippocratic Oath: above all, do no harm. There are a million opportunities along the way in development assistance to contradict your message with your medium.

Nuts and Bolts of Participation. The following practical, hands-on experience gleaned from the experience of the Implementing Policy Change (IPC) project is presented as a checklist or a menu of ideas that have worked successfully in one or more places.

- **Better political and institutional analysis**. The IPC project has found two techniques for political and institutional analysis -- stakeholder analysis and "political mapping"-- to be particularly useful in stimulating and focusing participation in policy reform. There are, however, three levels of participation in the use of such tools. The first, and the lowest level, is for a donor agency to do this kind of analysis to inform its own decision-making -- better than nothing but less than we should aspire to. The second way is for a donor agency to conduct studies to help host government leaders make their decisions in a more informed manner. The third level, and the one to be aspired to, is helping host country people conduct these studies themselves so that they themselves reach out to their stakeholders and learn what it means to view policy change in a broader context than the one they're used to.

- **Collaborative design**. Like Roberta and Carol, we have observed that collaborative design not only provides a forum for fostering consensus but also almost always increases the technical quality of the design. I originally thought that we would trade technical quality for building consensus, but that has not been our observation.

  It's preferable, but not always possible, for collaborative design to be used, not just to inform a donor program, but to look at a broad range of policies from the country's point of view. However, because of the institutional or the political environment, it may be much more practical to begin with a question like, "What should USAID be supporting in such and such an arena?" There's no question about the legitimacy of USAID promoting a participatory process on that issue.

- **Redesigning the technical content of the reforms to make participation more feasible**. An example from the United States: with block grants or decentralized decision-making rather than categorical programs that are centrally administered, the chance for involving a range of people in implementation goes up by an order of magnitude. We have also observed that there are more opportunities for participation during implementation than during the design stage. So if there is initial resistance to involvement at the design stage, there's a second chance to influence outcomes.

- **Capacity building**. There's been a lot of emphasis within USAID on looking for the "policy champion." However, policy issues are usually so complex that no individual can pull off the remediation of those problems by him or herself. The country also needs to look, and we need to look with them, at the capacity of institutions at all levels, inside and outside government, to do the jobs related to policy reform: policy analysis, lobbying and advocacy, and sometimes basic institution building. In line with this, donors need to make more use of local monitoring and evaluation, research, and analysis.

- **Implementation as a process, not as an event**. During implementation, all kinds of learning goes on and bumps appear in the road. The notion that implementation can be mapped out with certainty in the beginning is unrealistic. Participation makes it necessary to be responsive to a range of interests that may or may not have been fully understood at the outset. As a practical matter, this suggests the desirability of phased programs, rolling designs, and flexibility.

- **Extensive use of workshops and forums**. We have found there's a particularly effective role for donor agencies in facilitating forums--opportunities for people who don't normally get together to discuss things, or for people whose positions tend to isolate them, to get input from a variety of sources.

- **Structural solutions**. Governments can be helped to establish formal or semi-formal mechanisms for consultation and coordination such as policy implementation units. These units are typically attached either to the state house or sometimes to the cabinet office. Their job is to work in a collaborative way across ministries to promote participation in decision-making within the government, and then to reach outside that arena to get input from other sources.

To conclude, let me list a few lessons the IPC project has learned in applying the ideas discussed above.

- Policy change that is imposed is very unlikely to be implemented or sustained. It is striking how many ways a policy can be disrupted if people are disposed to do so. Their ability to stop changes in policy through subtle means is extraordinary.

- Policy change is inherently threatening to public-sector actors, as are participatory approaches. It's hard to manage, it has uncertain outcomes, and it produces new voices. We should do what we can to reduce the threatening aspects of participation.

- Meaningful participation is demand-driven from civil society as well as supply-led from government channels. Many efforts to increase participation have focused on trying to increase either the demand or the supply. What works best is to encourage both in tandem. Otherwise, what you have is either the frustration of too much demand and no plausible supply mechanism, or a government that is being asked to institute change for which there seems to be no pressure or demand from its citizens.

- It is possible to promote participatory approaches even under authoritarian regimes, if you are sensitive to the implications of what you are doing. The range of options is smaller, however. Participation, handled thoughtfully, can be quietly subversive. Addressing policy implementation and technical issues in a participatory manner provides a model of a different way for decisions to be made and implemented.

- Skills in planning are required to do participation right, in addition to a lot of hard work. Unfortunately, there are only a few people in developing countries who have been trained in participatory approaches and process skills.

- There is simply no one-size-fits-all in the participatory approach to policy reform. It *must* be tailored to the circumstances.

Discussion Period

The following excerpts capture the principal themes raised during the discussion period.

Authoritarian Regimes--How Feasible is Participation?

Brian Atwood: "In the case of Malawi, am I right in saying that the intent was to provide some permanence to the informal institutions that were being created through the participatory process? In addition to the policy reform, the mission was trying to allow those new institutions to put down some roots down."

Carol Peasley: "I strongly agree. As activities to open up an economic system occur, the political system itself is affected. The networks and relationships that are created will continue over time."

Larry Cooley: "There is a big difference between the way participation is promoted in a transitional state and the way it is done in a recalcitrant one. For example, who's sponsoring a public event or forum is important. That can change as the political structures change. In one situation institutions are being reinforced; in another, new models are being implanted."

Andy Sisson: "In Malawi one of the most effective things we did in promoting more associational rights, and ultimately creating a better framework for participation, was withholding aid, particularly balance-of-payments support. That is a very powerful statement, I believe."

Larry Cooley: "USAID can go further than I thought possible with the 'insidious,' or technical approach, as long as it works in avenues least likely to be initially seen as political. The process builds a certain momentum once it gets initiated, and manages to clear a number of hurdles. Even if the issue that preoccupies a mission is the governance issue, it should not pick the most political policy area to start in. The activities of the mission are less likely to be seen as threatening if it is encouraging people to get together and express their interests about issue that is less of an immediate threat to the entrenched powers. Since there are a whole range of policy issues that one could start with, there's a lot to go on.

Frequently, by framing the issue a little bit larger and looking for agreement around basic principles there are chances to do things that you couldn't otherwise do. The fora that Carol and Roberta were talking about at Bunda College could have been seen as threatening by the government if they had been perceived in governance terms."

Carol Peasley: "There are a lot of people, even in a repressive regime, who want to begin to talk about things. USAID can play a facilitative role in giving them a chance."

Roberta Mahoney: "In Malawi, the government gave us an entree to talk about political issues by stating that, in Malawi, people had enough food to eat and roofs over their heads even though that contrasted completely with one's daily observations. So we in the donor community were able to pose the question, 'Why, if there's enough food, are people hungry?' This opened a forum for us to discuss the divergence between what we were hearing and what we were seeing."

Keeping Washington At Arm's Length

Joe Stepanek: "Sometimes Washington must be kept at arm's length, certainly in the special sense of allowing time. The two-year money, the no-year money, is an important part of this. Mission directors that are committed can also create the time. But this question of time is interesting. In my experience in Tanzania, for instance, having spent 18 months designing the family-planning program in a highly collegial manner, we found that we had in fact 18 months of implementation under our belts when we finally signed, without having spent a dime of program money."

Carol Peasley: "On the question of Washington-based constraints to participation, clearly one of them is the issue of time: you have to obligate the funds by X date. Also, Washington can be too directive in saying, 'This is what you shall negotiate.' A third thing is delegation. Ours was a $50 million program for five years. We decided to reduce it to three years and $30 million, but we had the authority to do it. Larry Saiers (DAA/AFR) came out to see what we were doing, concurred with it, and we authorized it in the field. But it didn't get back into a system that chewed it up and ended up being directive. (I'm embarrassed to say this because I've been part of that directive process.)"

New Cultural Norms for USAID

Joe Stepanek: "It takes a mission director's leadership to create a culture in which participation is the norm. All too often mission staff draft their papers, take them over to the Minister of Finance, and basically say, 'Sign it or lose it.' That has never worked very well. Actual participation--I think that is something new. We've done it, but it has not been the rule. It has not been a part of the culture of all our missions."

Communications from the E-Mail Bag

The following excerpts are taken from the many e-mail comments sent in reaction to the forum.

Participation and Democratization

Anicca C. Jansen: "I spent some time in Malawi last fall and had the opportunity to attend a SHARED-sponsored training of board members of newly formed NGOs. Participants seemed both overwhelmed and excited by the possibilities that lay before them. It was clear that people were disclosing experiences, including human rights abuses, that they had never discussed publicly before. It was humbling to be a witness to the bravery that must be behind those disclosures and incredibly exciting to see the way in which the economic development process, via networking and local institution building, was fostering the democratic process. Let us keep in mind how frightening democratization may be to the individuals involved. Imagine what it feels like to be a Malawian buying her/his first opposition party newspaper."

Bob Charlick: "Some issues which I wish had been explored further regarding the use of the Malawi case:

"1) What does participation mean in a society where meaningful autonomous civil society organization is virtually impossible, and where there are on-going serious human rights abuses

targeted at perceived opponents? It is my understanding that these conditions were substantially present in Banda's Malawi in 1991-92 when this activity commenced.

"2) Is a 'participatory' approach in which the U.S. government promotes consultation and 'participation' through the use of its own agents because Malawian farmers have such limited freedom of association and expression, a sustainable one?

"3) Does it make sense to characterize the ag sector policy reform process as one that can be successful in an authoritarian society substantially because it is less political than dealing with governance issues? What can be more political in Malawi than decisions on who gets to grow and market the country's most important export crop, and whether elites controlling estates will be able to continue dominating these processes?

"4) If this was truly a politically sensitive issue, why did USAID and the other donors succeed in achieving the desired policy reforms? Was it substantially due to the participatory nature of the exercise, or to the threats of conditionality?

"These questions seem to beg for answers before we reach the conclusion that the Malawi, or any other particular case, is a 'success story' which we should consider publicizing and perhaps modeling."

Technical Assistance to Facilitate Process

Lee Ann Ross: "In Sri Lanka in 1988 USAID provided an advisor to help the government undertake a food and nutrition strategy under a process whereby the Sri Lankans did all the work themselves. No outsiders, no expert team jetting in with a cast of 20 delivering a strategy. I wrote an article on this experience: "Collaborative Research for More Effective Foreign Assistance," *World Development*, Vol. 16, No. 2: 231-236 (1988)."

"It is a good example of our technical assistance being used to facilitate process rather than provide substantive technical input. It was a lot of fun and very useful. Also very time consuming. But we built process and institutions and the strategy was owned by those who created it, not by USAID."

Staffing for Participation

Robert Young: "One possible barrier to participatory program implementation is the rapidity with which USAID staff move about. On the participatory front, I suspect that to identify and understand the best subsectors and tactics to use in promoting participatory sustainable development, it will take a year or two for the employee to understand and establish strong links and working relationships with appropriate individuals and institutions. This would be particularly so, if one is concerned about problems, people and institutions beyond the capital! Then, to capitalize on and work with those relationships and achieve significant impact, of course, will require substantially more time."

Pirie Gall: "If you were head of training, and had about $50-100,000 per year to invest in USAID staff to make them better participatory developers, what would you do? What skills would you want people to have or strengthen? What knowledge would you want them to gain or augment? What specific tools, techniques, or materials would you want people to learn about (this is about specific content, not training techniques)? Would you focus on cross-cultural skills, facilitation skills, listening-human interaction, analysis of survey data?"

Four Kinds of Participation

Robert Mitchell: "USAID has at least three and possibly four meanings for 'participation': It is (1) a dependent variable that we are trying to produce (e.g., more participation in a cash economy or higher voter turnout); (2) an independent variable that is a technique used to create consensus or to manage the implementation of policies (such as IPC emphasizes); and (3) both an independent and dependent variable that structures patterns and rates of participation more generally (the new institutional economics) in ways supportive of USAID's strategies for sustainable development. Finally, (4) generic institutional (participatory) and organizational development, in which creating a sewing club is as important as a small factory, for it represents the creation of an independent interest group participating in a society.

Rethinking Agency Objectives

Joe Lombardo: Participation, if truly implemented, negates the blueprint approach to development programs. To the extent we posit specific sectoral outcomes, we will find ourselves manipulating participation to gain support for *our* program. Once the process for true participation is started, the final outcome in terms of problem definition, and proposed solutions cannot be specified in advance. The resolution of this dilemma resides in how we define our mission as an agency."

"Policy reform programs have generally been couched in terms of specific measures to be achieved. All this presupposes we have not only have the answer and it is reachable; but that achievement of the target somehow solves the problem. However, we all know that the problems never go away. Our own country is still grappling with the issues of health care, fiscal reform, private sector v. public sector issues, governance issues (like term limits, public financing for elections, etc.). The difference is that we believe (rightly or wrongly) that we have the wherewithal to deal with the problems. We believe we can, on our own, debate and define the problem, devise solutions, and implement them. **I posit that we might view our mission in other countries as assisting them to develop the capability to define problems, weigh alternatives, put together viable programs to deal with manageable aspects of the issues, and to implement and evaluate these programs.**

"This view of USAID's mission would then be reflected in the kinds of objectives we wish to monitor and report on for assessing the effectiveness of the Agency's program (participation, inclusiveness of the process, openness of the society, development and implementation of viable programs that address real issues, capacity of civil society to identify and articulate problems requiring public sector assistance, etc.).

"Sectoral level achievements would still be accomplished inter alia through our financial, technical assistance and training contributions to host country programs. But we would worry less about whether we have standard indicators across all countries for measuring progress in agriculture or education; by definition, the participatory process in each country will likely produce different focuses.

"In sum, the goal of engaging in a participatory process to develop and implement assistance programs requires a rethinking of the way we conceive of development problems and issues, and the kinds of objectives we wish to focus on as an Agency."